DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 038 170 PS 002 967

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TITLE	Head Start Planned Variation Program.
PUB DATE	Sep 69
NOTE	5p.
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.35
DESCRIPTORS	*Comparative Analysis, *Compensatory Education Programs, *Federal Programs, Pilot Projects, *Preschool Programs, *Program Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS	Follow Through, Head Start, Planned Variation

ABSTRACT

There is little agreement concerning which methods of preschool intervention are most effective. In order to evaluate several approaches to early childhood education, Project Head Start, in conjunction with Project Follow Through, has initiated the Planned Variation program. This year only a pilot project is underway with eight schools participating. These are (1) University of Kansas, where Bushell uses a behavior analysis approach; (2) University of Illinois, where Becker and Engelmann use a structured, academic approach; (3) Bank Street College, where Gilkeson presents a developmental approach with emphasis on self-direction; (4) University of Arizona, where Henderson stresses behavioral skills and attitudes; (5) Ypsilanti, where Weikart relies on Piaget's cognitive theories; (6) University of Florida, where Gordon uses the concept of the parent-educator; (7) Far West Lab, where Nimnicht relies on the autotelic discovery approach; and (8) Education Development Center, where Armington follows on action-oriented approach. Evaluation will involve comparison of the development of children participating in the above programs with that of children attending regular Head Start programs within the same community or in a similar community. (MH)

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ED038170

September 1969

HEAD START PLANNED VARIATION PROGRAM

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Project Head Start was organized as a comprehensive program for the purpose of increasing opportunities for children of the poor by providing an environment in which each child has the opportunity to develop his full potential. As a comprehensive program, it offers preschool youngsters from poverty families a variety of services necessary to their total development.

There is general agreement that early childhood education has definite value and that early intervention in the child's life is an effective means by which to lessen or eradicate later psychological, sociological, and educational problems. There is lack of agreement, however, as to which methods are best suited for successful preschool intervention. Various methods have been developed, tested, and presented in the literature While some of these approaches are rather general, others are very specific. Some are based on similar principles, but others are quite divergent in basic philosophy. However all are attempting to find educational strategies best suited to a preschool program for children from low-income familes We are now attempting to evaluate several of these approaches on both a short and long term basis in order to obtain information about their relative effectiveness. This project called "Planned Variation" is an experimental program; it does not imply endorsement by Head Start of any of the models at this time.

Project Follow-Through is presently involved in exploring the relative effectiveness of 13 different approaches (models) to the education of young children from poverty families in elementary school. Project Head Start is implementing 8 approaches geared to the preschool child (age 4 and 5). Working in conjuction with Follow-Through will enable the program to serve several functions by providing:

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(1) Information about the impact of various well-defined educational environments and learning situations on the Head Start child.

(2) Information about the effect of continuity in early education and the effect of various approaches on children from Head Start through third grade (this will give us information about the effect of sequential programming for young children).

(3) Information about the lasting effect of specific program approaches. For instance, we will be able to find out if Head Start effects will be washed out by second grade for all approaches, for some approaches, or for none at all.

(4) Information about critical periods for intervention procedures. Is the program more effective if started at age 4, 5, or 6?

Evaluation of this project will be done by Stanford Research Institute, an outside independent agency. Both generally desirable and program-specific effects of each approach will be measured. Carried out over several years, the Planned Variation program will provide a carefully delineated study of a variety of approaches to the early education of poor children.

This year the Planned Variation program is a small pilot project. Only Head Start Centers which feed into ongoing Follow-Through models were eligible to participate. After Regional OEO offices and local communities were contacted by individual program sponsors the decision whether or not to participate in this project was made by the Head Start parents, staff, and local CAA Sixteen program communities (each sponsor is associated with two communities) and five comparison communities are participating in the project.

A. The eight planned variation approaches are briefly described below:

Don Bushell - University of Kansas

Don Bushell uses a behavior analysis approach. The goal of the program is to teach the child needed skills by means of systematic reinforcement procedures. The teacher's role is that of a behavior modifier. Individual instruction is emphasized through the use of programmed materials. Parents are hired and trained to use positive reinforcement techniques while teaching in the classroom; they also share responsibility for teaching these techniques to other parents.

Becker and Engelmann - University of Illinois

Becker and Engelmann use a structured, academic approach. The program is premised on the belief that every child can achieve well in the academic area if he receives adequate instruction and if there is a payoff for learning. Programmed materials are used to teach essential concepts and operations in reading, arithmetic, and language. A language training program is specifically designed to remedy language deficiency, teach language necessary for instruction and concepts used in logical thinking. Teachers systematically reinforce those behaviors that are desired. Parents are trained as teacher aides in the use of programmed materials and specific reinforcement techniques.

Elizabeth Gilkeson - Bank Street College

Bank Street College presents a developmental approach which has as its ultimate objective to enable each child to become deeply involved and self-directed in his learning. Activities are planned for both individual and groups of children. The classroom is the child's work room where he is free to investigate objects and explore media. Concrete, sensory, and motor activities are interrelated with opportunities for functional and expressive use of language The teacher is regarded as highly important in the program. She not only functions as a consistent adult whom the child learns to trust, but she also sensitizes the youngster to his experiences, to sights, sounds, feelings and ideas. Key elements in the program are: (1) staff development (2) parent involvement and (3) community relations.

Ronald Henderson - University of Arizona

This program emphasizes the development of behavioral skills and attitudes, categorized as: a language competence, an intellectual base, a motivational base, and societal arts and skills. While carefully structured, the curriculum is flexible and the organization of the class provides for frequent opportunities for small group and one-to-one adult-child interaction. A variety of behavioral options are made available to the child, providing opportunities to develop individual skills at individual rates. Imitation of a variety of desirable behavioral models provided is actively encouraged. Social reinforcement is used to ensure that the child experiences frequent gratification as a result of his behavior and skill acquisition. The assumptions are made that when opportunities for learning are made available (1) the child does not have to be forced, or even to be requested to learn and (2) that the optimal functioning of the instructional program is very dependent upon an effective parent involvement program.

David Weikeart - Ypsilanti, Michigan

David Weikart presents a cognitive oriented preschool program derived from the theories of Piaget. The program has three main foci - the curriculum which is cognitively oriented; the teacher who participates actively in developing class programs; the home, where the teacher works with the mother to promote cognitive growth in the child. Learning objectives are stated as behavioral goals which describe the behavior expected as a result of the learning activity. The child's level of performance must be determined so materials can be presented in a sequential fashion from the simple to the complex and from the concrete to the abstract. Language training and development of the self-concept are vital parts of the program.

Ira Gordon - University of Florida

Gordon uses an approach which utilizes the concept of the parent-educator. The parent-educator is a mother from the local community who works with each parent in the home by presenting weekly tasks, individualized for her child, for development of intellectual and cognitive skills, the parent-educator also assists in the classroom. The tasks that are taught in the classroom are then taken by her into the home, where she instructs the mother in how to teach the child. The mother thus learns (1) that education occurs in the home (2) what kinds of child activities she should encourage, and (3) that her behavior with her child can have an effect and that she can be successful. Gordon suggests that a continuous reporting on home visits and classroom observations should be the basis of curriculum development tailored to each community.

Glen Nimnicht - Far West Lab for Educational Research and Development

Nimnicht has developed a responsive environment program based on the autotelic discovery approach. The program aims to help children develop both a positive self-image and intellectual ability. Emphasis is placed on increasing the child's sensory and perceptual acuity, language development and concept formation, problem solving and abstract thinking ability. The autotelic learning activities are intended to be intrinsically motivating and self-rewarding - not dependent on external rewards or punishments. The total environment is organized to be responsive to the child's interest and his style of learning. The teacher is also responsive to the child. She guides him, helps him solve problems and find answers, but avoids providing him with solutions.

David Armington - Education Development Center

EDC uses a pragmatic and action-oriented approach. The objectives are: (1) to help Head Start fashion classroom environments responsive to the individual needs of children as well as to the talents and styles of the teachers (2) to develop the advisory concept as a way of facilitating continued growth and change in schools. Basic requirements are that there must be an effective program of staff development, adequately provisioned environments in which children can be challenged and stimulated, and a continuing program of parental involvement and interpretation. The class activities arise from the needs and interest of the group rather than from a prescribed curriculum. The teacher serves as a catalytic agent. She guides the children and structures the environment. A local advisor, with extensive teaching experience, is charged with responsibility for suggesting change as indicated within each classroom.

Evaluation

Evaluation of the project will involve comparison of the development of children participating in the sponsors' programs with that of children attending regular Head Start programs within the same community or in a similar community. The children will be studied early in Head Start, at the end of the Head Start year, and at the end of their first, second, and third years of school. Most of the children attending sponsored Head Starts are expected to continue in the same sponsors' Follow-Through classes; most of the children attending regular Head Start programs are expected to attend regular primary classes in schools without Follow-Through. The evaluation effort will place approximately equal emphasis on documenting implementation of the sponsors' programs and on measuring the children's affective and cognitive development. Three separate cohorts (1969-70, 1970-71, and 1971-72) will be studies in the same communities. The FY'69-70 effort is a pilot year with regard to both the program and evaluation; we anticipate that conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the programs will not be available until 1974, when the third cohort will have completed the second grade, and that preliminary finding will need to be regarded with great caution.

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